



## RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

# Tug and Give (and Take)

### Playing tug with your dog

Tug is fun and interactive; it requires you to be on the other end of the tug toy which makes this a very powerful tool, it also helps to increase your dog's focus on you, burns up excess energy and creates drive and motivation in your dog. Tug is a self-rewarding behaviour for your dog, and is a great way to regain focus on you whenever your dog is distracted. You can use it as a come when called motivator, a reward for when your dog has done the right behaviour, and even on a walk to distract your dog.

### What sort of tug toy?

Your dog probably won't like anything that doesn't feel nice in the mouth. We find that dogs like soft material such as polar fleece as it isn't harsh on the mouth. Harder materials such as rope can be abrasive on the mouth, so if your dog doesn't like playing tug it could be because you aren't using the right material/toy.

Make sure the toy is a sufficient length so it makes it less likely the dog will grab onto your hand rather than the toy.

### Take

It is important to teach your dog that you start the game with a signal such as a verbal cue.

This is important as it can teach your dog self control and not to just grab toys unless given a command. If your dog is over enthusiastic and grabs onto the tug toy before your take cue, don't engage with your dog, just ignore them. Try again when your dog is calm.

Your take command can be any word as long as you are consistent (examples are "get it", "OK", "yours").



### Tug

To make this a successful game there are some rules to be followed:

- The tug toy is yours (not your dogs). Don't let it lie around for your dog to play with it alone. Make sure you keep the toy out of reach and out of sight when you're not playing with it.
- YOU start and finish the game.
- If your dog's teeth ever meet skin (even by accident) end the game immediately.
- Teach a reliable 'Give'
- Always supervise children when they are playing tug with your dog



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To get your dog interested in the tug, wiggle it around on the ground about 30 cm from the dogs nose, as soon as the dog engages with toy get a little more excited. Be honest about wanting to play with your dog, don't be half-hearted, or feel embarrassed or your dog will mirror your reserve. As soon as your dog engages with the tug for 5-10 seconds start teaching Give.

### Give

Give is an essential behaviour to teach before the tug game proceeds too far and your dog's arousal level is too high.

To teach give, begin a game of "tug" with your dog. After about 5 seconds, offer your dog a high value treat, such as roast chicken, in exchange for the toy. You need to show your dog right on their nose that you have something really nice! When the dog releases the toy to eat the food, just remove the tug toy so it is out of reach. (If clicker training your dog, click when they release the toy.) If you can't find a food reward high enough to encourage your dog to let go, use another toy of equal value.

Repeat this exercise until your dog is anticipating the food, (be careful not to reward if your dog lets go of the toy when you are not holding it) then add the command 'give' (you can use other release cues such as "out" or "mine", just be consistent).

Gradually increase the time your dog has the toy in its mouth before asking for give, as you build the duration you can add a command like 'hold' to indicate that the dog is to continue with the toy in its mouth).

### FAQ's

#### What if my dog growls when playing tug?

Growling during tug play is fine, as long as you can teach your dog to control their arousal level. If you have a very keen dog with high drive, make sure you only play tug for short periods at a time, with frequent "give" breaks. Play growling is different to "stay away from me" growling.

#### What if I can't get my dog to give?

If your dog gets so involved in tug that it just won't give the toy up no matter what food or other toys you offer, then tug games must only be played in very short spurts (e.g. 2 seconds). Only ask your dog to take the toy in its mouth, then immediately ask for a give. Your dog will learn that they will get the toy back again if they release it.

#### What if I can't hold onto the tug toy and my dog runs off with it?

Hold tighter next time! Simply just walk away (go inside). Even if your dog races around with the toy all proud of themselves, they will learn that it is no fun when you don't interact with them. Later on when your dog has dropped the toy, retrieve the toy and put it away.



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### **Does playing tug games with my dog teach them to be pushy and dominant?**

No! Not if you follow the rules correctly. By teaching your dog a take and give cue and sticking to the rules outlined above, it will teach your dog to be respectful and responsive to you as well as control their arousal level.

### **My dog only plays tug with my other dog**

This is fine, as long as it is a different toy the dogs play with. If you are having trouble motivating your dog and teaching them to be interested in playing with you, have a look at our “silly game” info sheet.

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